

Keeping it in the family

Carlotta Eden chats to Neil and Paul Gerrard about changing lives, working with family, and winning Aesthetic Dentist and Technician of the Year 2016

Brothers Neil and Paul Gerrard are no strangers to the passion, hard work and dedication that has defined winners of the Aesthetic Dentistry Awards over the years.

Growing up, the two spent their childhood watching their father work in a dental laboratory. But it wasn't until after school that they eventually took an interest in dentistry as a career.

Since then, they have taken the dental world by storm – working hard to set up their own practice and on-site laboratory, Clifton Dental Studio, winning countless awards and establishing themselves as reputable dentists and technicians in the UK.

It comes as no surprise, then, that they were crowned Aesthetic Dentist and Technician of the Year 2016 at the Aesthetic Dentistry Awards this year in London.

So how did they do it? How do you go from watching their father work from a distance, to becoming revered dentists and technicians?

Here, Neil and Paul reveal the secrets to their success.

Raising the game

Leaving school, Paul says he 'didn't really know what to do' and came to work with his father on a temporary basis. Neil did the same, and temporary soon became permanent – some 25 years later, the pair are still making waves in the

dental industry.

Neil, now a dentist, began working as dental technician for almost a decade before an opportunity allowed him to take a 'sideways step' to becoming a practitioner. 'I wanted more control over what was going on and craved that interaction with patients, too,' he says, 'and I haven't looked back since!'

Beginning his career as a dental technician, Paul became a clinical dental technician in xxx, and says making the transition whilst running a busy laboratory was 'probably the hardest thing I will likely do in my career'.

I wondered if the similarities of both roles – technician and dentist – meant a relatively smooth transition, or whether the differences caught them both off guard.

Neil says coming from a technical background has helped him enormously as a dentist. 'It allowed me to accelerate my education very quickly,' he states. 'I didn't really need to learn how to prepare a tooth for a crown – I knew exactly what was required, so it meant that I could focus on other aspects of my education.'

In other words: patient communication.

He continues: 'It was a big factor for me; if you can't communicate with patients properly, then it doesn't matter what your technical skills are like, you're not going to be very successful

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with your patients.

'From time to time it also means that if there is a problem I can resolve it easier and quicker because I've got some of the technical abilities and knowledge to do so, without having to wait for the lab. It helps me

visualise what the end result is, and how to plan to get from A to B in the best possible way.'

Paul agrees, adding that both the technical and clinical knowledge propelled them both to 'raise their game' – perhaps just one of the reasons their work has won so many awards.

Feeling good

As well as being named Aesthetic Dentist and Technician of the Year, Neil and Paul also won the Restorative – Single Arch and Restorative – Conservative Smile Makeover Ceramic categories in the 2016 Aesthetic Dentistry Awards. Plus, Neil won in the Restorative – Single Tooth Composite category, and both have won awards and been highly commended for their work together in the past.

They say the technical challenges of aesthetic dentistry appealed the most when starting out, as well as the 'obvious result' gained after fixing a patient's smile.

'It's incredibly rewarding when patients are grateful for what you have done for them,' Neil says. 'You get to experience that journey with

Dr Neil Gerrard BDS RDT MSc (Dental Implantology) is a dentist and author of *There is No Perfect Dentist*. He achieved a masters degree in dental implantology in 2015 (MSc Bris) after working with dental implants as a dentist and technician for more than 25 years. He is a member of the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, the British Society of Occlusal Studies and the British Dental Association. He currently works at Clifton Dental Studio.

Paul Gerrard is a clinical dental technician with more than 20 years' experience in denture construction and is among the only clinical dental technicians in the UK to be recognised as both an examiner and accredited member of the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. He currently works at Clifton Dental Studio.



Neil Gerrard



Paul Gerrard

them from the moment they walk into the practice unhappy with their smile, to seeing them leave, looking fantastic!

Paul explains how it was exactly this type of fulfilment that spurred him into becoming a clinical dental technician. 'Seeing the difference our work makes to patients' lives is so rewarding,' he says. 'The laboratory has been on-site at Clifton Dental Studio for several years now, so I've had the opportunity to meet and work with patients directly, which really helps. Treating my own patients and seeing the end result of both my technical and clinical work takes things to another level and is extremely rewarding.'

Neil adds that cosmetic dentistry interested him from the get-go, and says the shift in patient demand for cosmetic treatment over the last 10 years has been huge.

He explains: 'There was a huge explosion of interest in offering smile makeovers around 15 years ago, which was typically treated with invasive procedures – but there's been a significant shift away from that now, especially in younger patients.'

'Now it's more orientated to orthodontic treatments or cosmetic bonding. People's expectations, as well as pressure within society to look a certain way – it all plays a part in the demand for cosmetic treatment.'

Both cite gaining accreditation with the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (BACD) as one of the biggest achievements in their careers, describing it as a 'rewarding and important' experience.

Brotherly love

Before setting up Clifton Dental in Bristol, Neil was working in NHS dentistry and focusing on 'finding [his] feet' after converting to a dental practitioner.

'There were some challenges in setting up the business, from managing staff to attracting new patients,' he says. 'It was a steep learning curve and I had to learn to look at it from a business perspective rather than a clinical one – it felt like having two jobs! Luckily I have great staff and my wife is involved with running the business, which frees me up from the administrative side of things.'

Neil and Paul work on-site together, balancing both the technical and clinical sides

Neil Gerrard collects his award at the 2016 Aesthetic Dentistry Awards



'There are some very good technicians out there and if dentists are not willing to listen, the relationship won't work'

of their professional relationship.

'Working with family has its challenges,' Paul says, 'but there is a job to do and as dental professionals, we are both working towards a common goal. Our achievements together are testament to the hard work we both put in, and I would not have had these opportunities without Neil.'

'We're always trying to do better, and we both have the same vision and passion,' Neil adds. 'It can sometimes be difficult to separate family life from work life, but on the other hand, it can be easier to work together and push things forward.'

When it comes to offering advice to dentists and lab technicians that work together, both believe that being on the same wavelength counts for a lot.

'I am lucky to work with clients who share a similar philosophy to quality-focused dentistry,' says Paul. 'Finding likeminded colleagues that share the same passion and commitment is very important. Achieving

the best results requires equal time and effort from the clinician and technician, so the whole team have to be on board.'

Neil adds that communication needs to be 'sans ego' – as he says: 'If there's an ego on one side more than the other, it won't work. It needs to be a level playing field.'

'It's two-way street: you have to be willing to learn and remain open-minded. There are some very good technicians out there and if they're not willing to listen, the relationship won't work.'

'From a technician's perspective, patient access and time in the clinic to watch and learn various procedures is invaluable, so making that time to give your technician these opportunities will help you grow, learn and benefit together,' adds Paul.

Irreplaceable

So what of the future? Where do they go from here, and where do they see aesthetic dentistry headed?

'I think the future of aesthetic dentistry lies in the hands of dedicated clinicians and technicians,' Paul says. 'Our best cases are often the result of a multidisciplinary approach, and technology is a tool that can't replace the human touch.'

'The amount of education now available to aesthetic dentists is huge,' Neil adds. 'There's no excuse for dentists not to be educated in an area they're interested in, so hopefully we'll just see better and better clinicians as time goes on. I see dentists produce fantastic work from around the world all the time, which is hugely inspiring.'

Avoiding monotony, focusing on getting better and improving your skills are elements that set both Neil and Paul apart from their rivals. And instead of chasing recognition from colleagues, focusing instead of building solid relationship with patients.

'Patients can be so grateful for what you've done for them,' Neil says. 'That's what gets us up every morning.'

'It's not the same every day, and it's rewarding being able to treat patients and change their lives. It's changed ours, too!'

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